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FM AMEMBASSY BANJUL
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 8800
RUEHPNH/NVC PORTSMOUTH 0030
INFO RUEHFT/AMCONSUL FRANKFURT 1575

UNCLAS BANJUL 000285

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR CA/FPP
DEPT ALSO PASS TO DHS
FRANKFURT PASS TO RCO PACKOWITZ

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [KFRD](#) [CVIS](#) [CPAS](#) [CMGT](#) [ASEC](#) [GA](#)

SUBJECT: FRAUD SUMMARY - BANJUL, MAR - AUG 2009

¶1. Embassy Banjul submits the following fraud report covering March through August 2009. Post notes, however, that Conoff arrived only in July 2009 and is just becoming familiar with consular work in The Gambia.

a. COUNTRY CONDITIONS: The Gambia, the smallest country on the mainland of Africa, relies heavily on tourism. The high tourist season (November to April) is a time of greatly increased economic activity since many jobs depending on the tourist trade are seasonal. Due to the global economic downturn, the number of tourists who visited The Gambia last year was down approximately 20%. There are fears that the upcoming season will be similarly slow, leading to a greater desire to emigrate and seek employment elsewhere. The Consular Section has already seen a surge in NIV applications in August, where the number of interviews increased to 713 from 557 in 2008.

The downturn in tourism should not greatly affect ACS work. The vast majority of tourists are European, since the hotels and beaches here are relatively unknown and expensive to reach from the U.S. The one event which does attract a number of Americans, the bi-annual Roots Festival, was scheduled for earlier this year but was postponed due to H1N1 flu fears and has yet to be rescheduled. The Gambian government is making an effort to attract more American tourism. Post recently issued two visas to officials going to a series of tourism trade shows in the U.S.

The majority of American citizens in The Gambia are dual national children with one or both parents in the U.S. As noted in the previous fraud summary, poor economic conditions have led to increasing requests from such citizens for financial assistance to move to the U.S. Since they are dual nationals and have resided here with extended family members for many years, they do not meet the conditions necessary for repatriation loans. Yet many of these young citizens or their family guardians are unaware of this and believe that post will provide them with airline tickets to the U.S.

Social structures in The Gambia differ greatly from the U.S. and complicate consular work. People who are well off are expected to provide financial and other support for extended networks of family members and friends. Few children grow up in what could be termed a traditional western nuclear family and many are informally adopted by relatives or friends who are financially more secure. Many NIV applicants rely on sponsors who will pay for the trips, or their tuition in student visa cases, and who are often termed "uncles" although they may be more distant relatives or simply family friends. The use of the term "brother" and "sister" to describe other relatives or close friends also complicates visa work and leads to many improperly filled out applications. In most cases, diligent questioning by Conoff and the NIV staff resolve these complexities, but they can sometimes provide avenues for fraud. Sponsor-applicant relationships are difficult to verify and some exist solely to facilitate travel.

b. NIV FRAUD: Most NIV fraud is not sophisticated and resolves around fake documents. Post has seen fake job letters, bogus invitations to conferences in the U.S. and forged academic records. The use of forged bank statements seems to be on the rise. Post has noticed a number of these in the last few months, especially in support of student visa applications. The banks here have been cooperative in verifying statements for us and collaboration between them, the section, RSO, and the local police has led to the arrest of two applicants who provided false statements. A third case is in the works. It is hoped that when word gets out that providing fraudulent bank statements can lead to arrest, the number of such cases will decline.

Incidents of fraud are particularly high with group travel. In one case, two Nigerians teaching in The Gambia posed as chaperones for 12 Gambians who were supposed to present a play at a UN youth festival. The Gambians were all supposed to be high school students, even though many were in their mid-twenties. When questioned about the purpose of travel and the play they were supposed to present, many were unable to state more than that they were going to New York. Three applicants recently posed as youth organizers for the opposition UDP party who were to accompany a senior UDP official on a fund-raising trip to the U.S. Two of the three spoke no English, only tribal languages and none were able to describe their activities as youth organizers. A check in ADIS also revealed that two of the three people who were given visas for a similar trip last year are still in the U.S.

Another common problem is that people who qualify for visas and have good travel records attempt to facilitate the migration of others to the U.S. Marriage certificates are easy to obtain - a couple only has to go the Muslim Kadi Court and declare that they are married - coupled with the fact that a Muslim man can have up to four wives, leads to cases in which a visa-holder marries simply to get the new wife a visa. Others seek to travel with sons or other relatives who have previous refusals.

Post also sees many applicants who wish to escort their American citizen nieces, nephews or other relatives back to their parents in the U.S. Some of these requests are legitimate, but others are simply attempts to facilitate travel. In any case, almost all of these applicants fail to overcome 214b. A common thread here is that even if the document fraud or false statements were believed by the Section, many of the applicants would still fail to overcome 214b.

c. IV FRAUD: Gambian IVs are processed in Dakar, but post does assist Embassy Dakar in investigations for Gambian IV applicants. Post also processes follow to join family members of refugees and asylees.

d. DV FRAUD: Post does not issue DVs but does answer requests for information concerning the lottery program.

e. ACS AND PASSPORT FRAUD: The ACS workload has been low since Conoff came to post and no direct ACS fraud has been observed. Most passport applicants are children born in the U.S. of Gambian parents. Progression photos are used to confirm identity and PIERS is always checked to confirm the parents' signatures. In CRIBA cases, the unreliability of local documents has led as a last resort to the use of DNA testing.

f. ADOPTION FRAUD: Post does not process adoption cases but does assist Dakar in investigating the few adoption cases that come out of The Gambia. Fraud exists in many of these cases, including, unfortunately, the applications of two long-time Embassy Banjul LES for SIVs. SIV status was granted, but at the request of Dakar, the Section investigated adoption certificates which both employees had submitted for derivative children. The certificates were found to be fraudulent. Dakar has submitted an Advisory Opinion concerning these cases and both posts are waiting for a response from Washington before proceeding any further. Conoff has recently written a new SOP for Banjul SIVs to hopefully eliminate such cases. The Consular Section Chief will examine all documents before the Ambassador makes his recommendation for SIV status. If fraud is discovered, the Ambassador has the option of declining to recommend the status.

g. USE OF DNA TESTING: Post continues to use DNA testing in citizenship claims and Visas 92/93 cases. The panel physician facilitates such requests. The fact that many children are registered late, often right before an application begins, and that authentic but factually-incorrect documents can be easily obtained, leads to the frequent use of DNA testing. A minority of tests come back negative, but in many cases the application is simply abandoned when DNA testing is mentioned.

h. ASYLUM AND OTHER DHS BENEFITS: Post handles follow-to-join asylee and refugee cases and sees many situations where beneficiaries who are not actually offspring of the principal applicant are added to the case. DNA testing weeds most of these out or causes them to abandon their application.

i. ALIEN SMUGGLING, TRAFFICKING, ORGANIZED CRIME, TERRORIST TRAVEL: Embassy Banjul has not experienced any organized alien smuggling, trafficking, crime or terrorism rings to this date. Alien smuggling is often attempted, but is done on a small scale. The two examples cited above in the second paragraph on NIV Fraud being the largest examples.

j. DS CRIMINAL FRAUD INVESTIGATIONS: Banjul is a small post in which most investigations are handled within the Consular Section. Nonetheless, the relationship between the Section and the RSO is strong and RSO has facilitated, through the use of their police contacts, the arrest of two NIV applicants who presented forged bank statements. An RSO investigator also looked into two arrests made at the Banjul airport. Local newspapers stated that the perpetrators had forged a U.S. travel document but it turned out that one had simply given the other his green card to try to enter the U.S. FPP was apprised of the result of the case.

k. HOST COUNTRY PASSPORT, IDENTITY DOCUMENTS, AND CIVIL REGISTRY: Marriage and birth certificates can be easily obtained at any time through the use of sworn affidavits. Counterfeit documents are rarely seen since fraud is easily done through the acquisition of genuine but false documents. GOG has recently introduced a new biometric national identification. The card is much more secure than its laminated predecessor but lacks the holder's signature. The card is part of an ambitious project entitled GAMBIS through which GOG hopes to eventually issue biometric passports, driver's licenses and other civil documents.

l. COOPERATION WITH HOST COUNTRY AUTHORITIES: Host country cooperation has improved. Conoff has visited officials at the Medical and Health Department who promised increased assistance in verifying birth certificates. A visit to the Cadi Court, a Muslim authority who handles the vast majority of marriage and divorce certificates, has led them to provide us with a number of expedited verifications. The local police have also been cooperative in arresting applicants with false bank statements.

m. AREAS OF PARTICULAR CONCERN: visa fraud remains pervasive, but is primarily low caliber and individual. Post is concerned that a skilled human trafficker could take advantage of the ease with which civil documents can be obtained here to commit visa fraud on a larger, more organized scale.

n. STAFFING AND TRAINING: The FPU staff consists of Conoff and one part-time LES. The LES is also the Section's visa clerk. None of the staff in the Section have attended fraud training in the past six months. The LES took a fraud training course in 2007. Conoff has yet to take a fraud prevention course at FSI and hopes to do so in the beginning of next year.

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